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## ITALIAN INFLUENCE ON RONSARD'S THEORY OF THE EPIC

A number of articles establishing the existence of Italian influence on many of the ideas of the members of the Pléiade have appeared within the last few years, but the degree of influence that the various critical treatises appearing in Italy before the year 1570 have exercised on the theoretical views of Ronsard has as yet not been stated. The problem is somewhat complicated by the fact that, although one is confronted by the similarity in thought and expression between Ronsard and the Italians, the constant reservation must be made that there is, in most cases, a common source for nearly all of the critical theory, namely either Aristotle or Horace. It has been clearly established, I think, by Lintilhac<sup>1</sup> that, before Scaliger (1561), Aristotle's *Poetics* were not known or cited by poets in France. To be sure, Erasmus had mentioned the title of the *Poetics* in a letter to Jean Morus, the twenty-seventh of February, 1531, and had edited it without comment at Bâle the same year, and it had been published in 1559 by Guillaume Morel, but none of the critics or poets seems to have been inspired by the *Poetics* before Scaliger. There is but a short interval of four years between the publication of Scaliger's *Poetices* and Ronsard's *Abrégé*, and one might well question the fact of Ronsard's deriving much inspiration from the *Poetics* of Aristotle directly, although we know that he was familiar to a certain degree with the work.<sup>2</sup> Be that as it may, there seems to be justification, despite the meagerness of the material available in the three short treatises of Ronsard, for believing that Italian influence is to be found in his theory of the epic. The present writer has endeavored to give cases in which Ronsard has either stated or developed his ideas in

<sup>1</sup> "Un Coup d'état dans la république des lettres," *la Nouvelle Revue*, 15 mai, 1890.

<sup>2</sup> In the *Abrégé de l'art poétique*, which is addressed to Alphonse Delbène: "Je te dirois icy particulièrement les propres subiectz d'un chacun poëme, si tu n'avois desja veu l'art poëtique d'Horace et de Aristote, ausquelz je te connois assez mediocrement versé." P. de Ronsard, *Œuvres*, ed. Marty Laveaux, Paris, Lemerre (1887-1893), vi, 454.

a manner similar to the Italians, and different from the treatment of the subject by either Aristotle or Horace.

In regard to the unity of time Ronsard states in his second preface to the *Franciade* that "le Poëme Heroïque . . . comprend seulement les actions d'une année entière."<sup>3</sup> There seems to be little doubt of the fact that he has borrowed this idea from Minturno, who in his *Arte poetica* (1564) says:<sup>4</sup> "Benchè egli abbia questa prerogativa di potere crescer tanto, non però la materia della Favola sia più che una, ne di cose avvenute in più lungo spazio, che di un'anno." The fact that this limitation occurs in Minturno alone of all the Italian and French critical treatises would seem to establish sufficient evidence of influence. Aristotle, it will be remembered, said only that the action of epic poetry has "no fixed limit of time."<sup>5</sup>

On the question of the relationship between history and poetry we find Ronsard following the Italians rather than Aristotle. "Plusieurs croyent," he says,<sup>6</sup> "que le Poëte & l'Historien soient d'un mesme mestier; mais ils se trompent beaucoup, car ce sont divers artisans, qui n'ont rien de commun l'un avecques l'autre, sinon les descriptions des choses, comme batailles, assauts, montaignes, forests & rivieres, villes, assietes de camp, strategemes, nombre des morts, conseils & pratiques de guerre: en cela il ne faut point que le Poëte faille, non plus que l'Historien." And again:<sup>7</sup> "Encore que l'histoire en beaucoup de sortes se conforme à la Poësie, comme en vehemence de parler, harangues, description de batailles, villes, fleuves, mers, montaignes, & autres semblables choses." Daniello, writing in 1536, had said:<sup>8</sup> "Conciosia cosa che molte di quelle cose ha l'Historico, che sono con quelle del Poeta comuni. Si come sono le descrittioni de i luoghi, de popoli, delle nationi, i siti, le leggi, le consuetudini, i costumi." Minturno in the *De Poeta* had said:<sup>9</sup> "Narratur enim, cum describuntur personae, causae, loca, tempora, actiones, perturbationes animorum, modus, instrumentum"; and Scaliger, manifesting the same six-

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 523.

<sup>4</sup> Antonio Minturno, *L'Arte poetica*, Napoli, 1725, p. 25.

<sup>5</sup> V, 4. Cf. I. Bywater, *Aristotle on the Art of Poetry*, Oxford, 1909.

<sup>6</sup> *Œuvres*, III, 524.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 514.

<sup>8</sup> Bernardino Daniello, *Della poetica*, Vinegia, 1536, p. 42.

<sup>9</sup> *De Poeta*, Venetiis, MDLIX, p. 114.

teenth-century fondness for long series of words, had spoken of poetry's describing "tempestates, bella, fugas, artes varias."<sup>10</sup> Aristotle had written: "From what we have said, it will be seen that the poet's function is to describe, not the thing that has happened, but the kind of thing that might happen, *i. e.*, what is possible as being probable or necessary. The distinction between historian and poet . . . consists really in this: that one describes the thing that has been and the other the kind of thing that might be."<sup>11</sup> In Ronsard's amplification of this thought we can see the evidence of Italian borrowing.

Plato, in the *Phaedrus*,<sup>12</sup> wrote: "You will allow that every discourse ought to be a living creature having its own body and head and feet; there ought to be a middle, beginning, and end, which are in a manner agreeable to one another and to the whole." Aristotle, taking this up, had written:<sup>13</sup> "The construction of its stories should clearly be like that in a drama; they should be based on a single action, one that is a complete whole in itself, with a beginning, middle, and end, so as to enable the work to produce its own proper pleasure with all the organic unity of a living creature." The idea of an organism evidently underlies Aristotle's conception of unity, but it remained for an Italian, Giraldis Cinthio, to amplify and embellish this conception: "Et la similitudine è, che mi pare che si possano assimigliare i corpi de i Poemi alla compositura del corpo humano. Però che come l'huomo è fatto di anima et di corpo, et il corpo è di ossa et di nervi, di carne, et di pelle, . . . così le compositioni de i buoni Poeti debbono haver parti ne i corpo loro, che corrispondano alle parti, che compongono l'huomo."<sup>14</sup> Ronsard follows Giraldis Cinthio very closely: "Car tout ainsi qu'on ne peut veritablement dire un corps humain, beau, plaisant, et accomply, s'il n'est composé de sang, venes, arteres et tendons, et sur tout d'une nayve couleur; ainsi la Poësie ne peut estre plaisante . . . sans belles inventions, descriptions, comparaisons, qui sont les nerfs et la vie du livre."<sup>15</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Julii Caesaris Scaliger, *Poetices*, MDXCIV, lib. I, cap. 1.

<sup>11</sup> IX, 2. Cf. Bywater, *op. cit.*

<sup>12</sup> *The Dialogues of Plato*, translated into English by B. Jowett, I, 569.

<sup>13</sup> Ch. XIX, Bywater, *op. cit.*

<sup>14</sup> Giovambattista Giraldis Cinthio, *Discorsi*, Vinegia, 1554, p. 16.

<sup>15</sup> *Œuvres*, VI, 451.

"Le Poème Heroïque . . . est tout guerrier," says Ronsard;<sup>16</sup> and again:<sup>17</sup> "le Poète heroïque . . . décrit les batailles et assauts, factions et entreprises de guerre," an idea which had been expressed by numerous Italians. Daniello, for instance, laments that up to his time no one had written "heroicamente delle guerre,"<sup>18</sup> and Varchi asserts that "la guerra pare piu atto, e piu proprio soggetto de poeti Heroici."<sup>19</sup> This idea, of course, may have been deduced from Horace's

Res gestae regumque ducumque et tristia bella  
Quo scribi possent numero monstravit Homerus,<sup>20</sup>

but it is more than probable that Ronsard was merely following the accepted idea of the subject of the epic poem.

Ronsard writes:<sup>21</sup> "Et davantage je ne sçaurois croire que Priam, Hector, Polydame, Alexandre, et mille autres tels ayent jamais esté, qui ont tous les noms Grecs, inventez par Homere: Car si cela estoit vray, les chevaliers Troyens eussent porté le nom de leurs païs Phrygien, et est bien aisé à cognoistre . . . que la guerre Troyenne a esté feinte par Homere"; and again:<sup>22</sup> "Les excellens Poètes nomment peu souvent les choses par leur nom propre." Regarding this question of the employment of true names, Minturno states:<sup>23</sup> "Ma benchè l'Epico, ed il Tragico Poeta usino i veri e conti nomi, non però dal genere, e dalla natura universale si dipartono. Come dicon' alcuni, che l'Epico usa pochissimi veri nomi? Io non so per quale cagione. Ma certamente dirien menzogna, se intenderessero delle persone, le quali sien della Favola tolta dalla Storia: conciossiacosachè, di quelle i nomi tutti sien veri appo Virgilio, ed Omero." There is nothing to suggest the idea of the employment of true names to Ronsard unless he had borrowed it from the Italians, except a somewhat unrelated passage in Horace, which would not seem to bear greatly on the point at issue:

Ficta voluptatis causa sint proxima veris.<sup>24</sup>

Ronsard refers frequently to the Italians in his prefaces and in

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 523.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Della poetica*, p. 131.

<sup>19</sup> Benedetto Varchi, *Lezzioni*, Fiorenza, MDXC, p. 616.

<sup>20</sup> *Ars poetica*, 73-74.

<sup>21</sup> *Œuvres*, III, 515.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 521.

<sup>23</sup> *L'Arte poetica*, p. 39.

<sup>24</sup> *Ars poetica*, 338.

the *Abrégé*,<sup>25</sup> and there are many evidences that would lead one to suspect Italian influence where it cannot be verified. The probability is very strong that Ronsard was familiar with Minturno and Daniello, although he mentions neither by name. To sum up, then, there are certain statements which Ronsard makes which are found only in his Italian predecessors. His restricting the epic to one year could not have been suggested by Aristotle; his discussion of the relationship of historian and poet is not at all similar to Aristotle's, nor is his development of the idea of an organism to be found in the Stagirite.

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## REVIEWS

*Edmund Spenser. A Critical Study.* By HERBERT ELLSWORTH CORY. Berkeley, University of California Press. 1917. VIII, 478 pp.

Mr. Cory's volume is an important testimony to the large place now held by the poetry of Spenser in the field of American philological scholarship. In his Preface, the author sets forth a two-fold purpose: first, "to come to certain conclusions about Spenser only on the basis of a vast number of experiences of other readers of Spenser in every decade from 1579 to 1917," these conclusions, he thinks, having grown "with a logical and almost biological continuity from many earlier interpretations," and deriving their authority not only from literary criticism, but from hints of method, from facts, and from relevant interpretations gained through the study of modern science. Second, Mr. Cory seeks to relate his study of Spenser to "twentieth-century nationalism, imperialism, feminism, and that socialistic-syndicalistic controversy which is to be the twentieth century version of the old struggle between those who emphasize the social contract and those who emphasize the rights of individuals and of minorities." In working out these purposes Mr. Cory gives a review of the entire corpus of Spenser's poetry, with a digest of Spenser criticism extending to 1917. This digest, in view of the advance in Spenser scholarship

<sup>25</sup> *Œuvres*, III, 514, 525, 534, 535; also VI, 450, 454.